

1 Introduced by Committee on Human Services

2 Date:

3 Subject: Human services; emergency housing

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish a
5 continuum of supports and services to prevent or divert households from
6 homelessness and to address the needs of Vermonters who are homeless.

7 An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homelessness Response
8 Continuum

9 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

10 * * * Findings, Legislative Intent, and Purpose * * *

11 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

12 The General Assembly finds that:

13 (1) although an imperfect tool for measuring the true number of
14 unhoused Vermonters, the Vermont Homeless Management Information
15 System as of December 2025 indicated that there were 4,022 individuals who
16 were homeless in the State, 863 of whom were children under 18 years of age;
17 and

18 (2) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that of the
19 36,000 primary homes needed in Vermont between 2025 and 2029, the number
20 needed to address homelessness is 3,295.

1 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

2 It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

3 (1) unsheltered homelessness be eliminated and that homelessness in
4 Vermont be rare, brief, and nonrecurring;

5 (2) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel
6 rooms for emergency housing;

7 (3) utilization of an emergency housing benefit to access hotels and
8 motels through the General Assistance program end and be replaced by a
9 continuum of services; and

10 (4) a continuum of supports and services be available to provide a stable
11 pathway to permanent housing that meets the specific needs of households
12 experiencing homelessness.

13 Sec. 3. PURPOSE

14 It is the purpose of this act to:

15 (1) establish a continuum of supports and services for households who
16 are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of experiencing
17 homelessness;

18 (2) ensure that tailored, temporary emergency housing assistance is
19 available to Vermonters in a manner that encourages efficient and accountable
20 use of taxpayer funds;

- 1 (3) support self-sufficiency and reduce returns to homelessness by
2 developing personalized housing plans with required participation by
3 households;
- 4 (4) establish clear eligibility criteria and require active household
5 participation;
- 6 (5) expand the use of alternative emergency housing models in
7 partnership with municipalities, nonprofit community-based providers, and
8 private landlords;
- 9 (6) integrate supportive services to assist households to achieve
10 permanent housing stability;
- 11 (7) establish transparent accountability measures, reporting
12 requirements, and oversight mechanisms;
- 13 (8) increase program efficiency and promote maximum flexibility in
14 administering services and supports in the continuum;
- 15 (9) empower local communities to administer emergency housing
16 services with maximum flexibility; and
- 17 (10) create a diversified system of emergency housing options,
18 including shelters, specialized shelters, shared housing arrangements, host-
19 home models, master-lease units, and rapid rehousing placements, that provide
20 cost-effective, sustainable, and supportive outcomes to households.

1 * * * Creation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum * * *

2 Sec. 4. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is added to read:

3 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE CONTINUUM

4 § 2201. DEFINITIONS

5 As used in this chapter:

6 (1) “Alternative housing options” means housing options including
7 shelters, specialized shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared
8 housing arrangements, host-home models, master-lease units, and rapid
9 rehousing placements.

10 (2) “Applicant” means a household that applies for emergency housing
11 assistance.

12 (3) “At risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without
13 sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

14 (4) “Case management services” means individualized supportive
15 services.

16 (5) “Coordinated entry” means a process that standardizes the way
17 households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness access and
18 are assessed for and referred to the housing and services that a household needs
19 for housing stability.

1 (6) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

2 (7) “Disability” means a physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental, or
3 mental health condition or substance use disorder that substantially limits one
4 or more major life activities, or that requires ongoing support, accommodation,
5 or treatment to maintain an individual’s health, safety, or independence. The
6 term includes chronic or episodic conditions that significantly impact daily
7 functioning, regardless of whether the individual is receiving, or is eligible to
8 receive, federal disability benefits.

9 (8) “Diversion” means a strategy aimed at preventing homelessness by
10 helping households find immediate alternative housing options instead of
11 entering shelters. Diversion focuses on addressing the needs of those who
12 have recently lost their housing.

13 (9) “Eligible household” means a household that is homeless and is
14 physically present and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced by active
15 participation in a housing, employment, or other Agency of Human Services-
16 recognized plan.

17 (10) “Emergency cold-weather shelter” means publicly funded shelter
18 beds made available to households during periods when the National Weather
19 Service is forecasting temperatures at or below 10 degrees Fahrenheit
20 including windchill for the majority of the State.

1 (11) “Emergency housing” means temporary shelter, lodging, or other
2 housing support, or related services provided to eligible households to protect
3 the health, safety, and welfare of an eligible household when no safe housing
4 option is immediately available.

5 (12) “Highly structured shelter” means a shelter that provides
6 programming that emphasizes case management, housing stability,
7 employment, education, or treatment services, as well as other services as
8 appropriate, in a manner that accommodates an eligible household’s disability,
9 if any.

10 (13) “Homeless” means:

11 (A) lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

12 (B) facing imminent loss of primary nighttime residence;

13 (C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence;

14 (D) residing in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars,
15 parks, abandoned buildings, or streets; or

16 (E) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

17 (14) “Household” means an individual or group of individuals, with or
18 without children, including individuals who reside together as one economic
19 unit, who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

20 (15) “Low-barrier shelter” means a shelter that minimizes barriers to
21 entry by reducing the rules and programmatic requirements found in highly

1 structured shelters, while still providing case management and other housing
2 support services in a manner that accommodates an eligible household's
3 disability, if any.

4 (16) “Minor child” means an individual under 18 years of age.

5 (17) “Office” means of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

6 (18) “Permanent supportive housing” means long-term housing with
7 wraparound services for individuals with complex health and social needs.

8 (19) “Prevention” means services intended to prevent a household from
9 becoming homeless, including housing relocation or stabilization services or
10 short-term rental assistance, including rental arrearage.

11 (20) “Program” means the Vermont Homelessness Response
12 Continuum.

13 (21) “Rapid rehousing” means short- to medium-term rental assistance
14 and supportive services aimed at assisting a household to quickly exit
15 homelessness.

16 (22) “Shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s shelter
17 standards.

18 (23) “Specialized shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s
19 shelter standards and applicable standards for the delivery of additional
20 services, including health care, mental health services, or services related to
21 substance use disorder.

1 (24) “Supportive services” means individualized supports that assist a
2 household in obtaining and maintaining housing, including:

3 (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness;

4 (B) household needs assessments;

5 (C) case management;

6 (D) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

7 (E) housing navigation services;

8 (F) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
9 assistance;

10 (G) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

11 (H) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the

12 household’s housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported
13 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability
14 and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance,
15 including treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder;

16 (I) progress monitoring of interventions; and

17 (J) services to ensure continuity after a permanent placement.

18 (25) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
19 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, including
20 cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or streets.

1 § 2202. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

2 CONTINUUM

3 (a) The Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum is established to
4 create an array of services that prevent and address homelessness in Vermont.
5 The Program shall be administered by the Department’s Office of Economic
6 Opportunity.

7 (b) The Office shall maintain a continuum of services that is flexible,
8 housing focused, and designed to prevent homelessness whenever possible.
9 The continuum shall prioritize early intervention, rapid resolution of housing
10 crises, and equitable access to emergency and permanent housing.

11 (c) The Program shall:

12 (1) provide temporary emergency housing to eligible households
13 experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness;

14 (2) reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing
15 assistance;

16 (3) expand the use of alternative housing options in partnership with
17 community organizations, municipalities, and private landlords;

18 (4) integrate case management and individualized housing plans into
19 all emergency housing placements; and

20 (5) ensure accountability, transparency, and cost efficiency in the use
21 of public funds.

1 § 2203. **PROGRAM** COMPONENTS

2 (a) The continuum of services shall consist of the following:

3 (1) level 1: prevention and diversion services;

4 (2) level 2: shelter services:

5 (A) level 2A: highly structured shelter services; and

6 (B) level 2B: low-barrier shelter services;

7 (3) level 3: specialized shelter services;

8 (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services;

9 (5) level 5: hotels and motels:

10 (A) level 5A: hotels and motels with supportive services; and

11 (B) level 5B: cold weather use of hotels and motels; and

12 (6) other emergency housing services.

13 (b) The Office shall address each of the services in subsection (a) of this
14 section by separate line items in its budget. The Department shall be
15 responsible for any transfers to other Agency of Human Services departments
16 necessary to implement the services listed in subsection (a) of this section.
17 The Department and other departments within the Agency of Human Services
18 shall maximize federal receipts, as applicable, for services listed in subsection
19 (a) of this section.

1 (c) Upon assessing a household’s needs, the Office or community partners
2 shall place the household in the appropriate level of care to address the
3 household’s specific needs.

4 § 2204. PREVENTION AND DIVERSION SERVICES

5 Level 1: prevention and diversion services.

6 (1) Prevention and diversion services shall function as the primary entry
7 point to the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum for all households
8 although connection may be made at any level. The Office shall ensure that
9 prevention and diversion services are provided through an agreement with one
10 or more community partners in each region of the State in a manner that
11 accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. All households, upon
12 request for assistance, shall receive a brief standardized initial prevention and
13 diversion assessment to identify safe alternatives to homelessness and resolve
14 immediate housing barriers.

15 (2) Prevention includes activities to avert entry into homelessness.

16 Diversion includes problem-solving interventions and supports that safely
17 resolve a housing crisis without the use of shelter or hotel placements.

18 (3) Funds administered for prevention and diversion services shall have
19 maximum flexibility.

20 § 2205. SHELTER SERVICES

21 (a) Level 2A: highly structured shelter services.

1 (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office shall
2 determine the need for highly structured shelter services and develop sufficient
3 highly structured shelter beds to address that need. The Department through
4 the Office shall enter into agreements with community partners for the
5 provision of highly structured shelter services for a period of not less than two-
6 years at a time.

7 (2) Highly structured shelters shall provide programming that
8 emphasizes case management, housing stability, employment, education, or
9 treatment services, as well as other services as appropriate, in a manner that
10 accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. Eligible households
11 receiving highly structured shelter services shall participate in case
12 management and other services to the extent of the eligible household’s ability.

13 (3) The Office shall ensure that highly structured shelter services meet
14 the Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code
15 (CVR 28-070-001).

16 (4) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
17 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, highly
18 structured shelter services is the preferred initial placement if capacity,
19 staffing, and geographic accessibility are available.

20 (b) Level 2B: low-barrier shelter services.

1 (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office shall
2 determine the need for low-barrier shelter services and, develop sufficient low-
3 barrier shelters to address that need. The Department through the Office shall
4 enter into agreements with community partners for the provision of low-barrier
5 shelters for a period of not less than two years at a time.

6 (2) Low-barrier shelters shall minimize barriers to entry by reducing the
7 rules and programmatic requirements found in highly structured shelters, while
8 still providing case management and other housing support services in a
9 manner that accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. Stays in
10 low-barrier shelters shall be time limited, and eligible households shall be
11 transitioned to highly structured shelter services or permanent housing as soon
12 as feasible.

13 (3) The Office shall ensure that low-barrier shelter services meet the
14 Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR
15 28-070-001).

16 (4) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
17 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the highly
18 structured shelter services in subsection (a) of this section, low-barrier shelter
19 services may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are
20 available.

1 § 2206. SPECIALIZED SHELTER SERVICES

2 Level 3: specialized services.

3 (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose:

4 (A) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall
5 determine the need for and, to the extent funds permit, develop specialized
6 shelter services that comply with the Department of Public Safety, Vermont
7 Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR 28-070-001), as well as any other
8 applicable standards relevant to the specialty population; and

9 (B) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall enter
10 into agreements with community partners for the provision of specialized
11 shelter services for a period of not less than two years.

12 (2) Specialized service shelters shall provide services delivered in a
13 highly structured shelter as well as additional specialty services, such as
14 services for substance use disorder and mental and physical health conditions.
15 Eligible households receiving specialized shelter services shall participate in
16 case management and other services to the extent of the eligible household's
17 ability.

18 (3) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1
19 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the level 2
20 shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, a specialized service shelter

1 may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are available
2 and the eligible household requires specialized services.

3 § 2207. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

4 Level 4: Permanent supportive housing.

5 (1) The Agency of Human Services or any department within the
6 Agency shall provide or enter an agreement for permanent supportive housing
7 that combines long-term, community-based rental assistance with voluntary,
8 flexible supportive services, such as family supportive housing and other
9 supportive housing services funded in whole or in part by Medicaid, if the
10 household and services are eligible.

11 (2) Eligible households receiving permanent supportive housing services
12 shall participate in case management, planning for housing stability, and other
13 services to the extent of the eligible household's ability.

14 (3) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1
15 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, the level 2
16 shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, or the level 3 specialized
17 shelter services in section 2206 of this chapter, permanent supportive housing
18 may be utilized where capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are
19 available.

20 § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS

21 (a) Level 5: Hotels and motels generally.

1 (1) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel
2 and motel rooms. However, until sufficient permanent affordable housing or
3 shelter services are available, the use of hotel and motel services shall be
4 permitted.

5 (2) If an eligible household is placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
6 section, the Department shall:

7 (A) enter into an agreement with one or more community partners to
8 provide relevant supportive services;

9 (B) permit a population-specific placement to the extent certain
10 populations are not isolated from the wider community served by the Program;
11 and

12 (C) use only hotel and motel rates established by the General
13 Assembly.

14 (3) If an eligible household is placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
15 section, the community partners shall enter into agreements for the use of
16 blocks of hotel and motel rooms and negotiate conditions of use for those
17 blocks, including access to providers of case management and other supportive
18 services, with space to provide services as negotiated.

19 (4) A hotel or motel used pursuant to this chapter shall comply with
20 Program rules and the following rules:

1 (A) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule
2 (CVR 13-140-023); and

3 (B) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
4 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

5 (5) Services provided pursuant to this subsection shall not occur on a
6 night-by-night basis.

7 (b) Level 5A: hotels and motels with supportive services.

8 (1) Eligible households placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
9 Program shall receive supportive services and participate in case management
10 services, planning for housing stability, and other services to the extent of the
11 eligible household’s ability.

12 (2) The Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of its
13 budget presentation for the General Assembly’s consideration.

14 (3) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met by levels 1–4 of the
15 continuum as described in sections 2204–2207 of this chapter, the Office may
16 utilize hotels and motels if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are
17 available.

18 (4) The utilization of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this subsection
19 shall be capped at 700 rooms per night.

1 (c) Level 5B: cold weather use of hotel and motels.

2 (1) To the extent funds **are appropriated** for this purpose, a household
3 shall be placed in general-access hotels and motels if no available option exists
4 within levels 1–5A of the continuum.

5 (2) Annually between December 1 and March 31, households may be
6 placed in general-access hotels and motels. Use of hotels and motels during
7 these months shall only occur if no available option exists within levels 1–5A
8 of the continuum.

9 (3) The utilization of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this subsection
10 shall be capped at 1,000 rooms per night between December 1 and March 31.

11 § 2209. OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

12 (a) Municipal supports. The Department **through the Office** shall provide
13 **grants** to municipalities in areas of the State with a high volume of unsheltered
14 homelessness, including municipalities underserved by traditional funding
15 sources. The use of this aid is at the discretion of the municipality and
16 includes providing access to basic life-sustaining shelter when the National
17 Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory. Shelter provided pursuant
18 to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a coordinated entry
19 assessment or case management, and shall have minimal data reporting
20 requirements.

1 (b) Emergency cold-weather shelters. Emergency cold-weather shelters
2 shall be managed through an agreement between the Office and one or more
3 community partners to provide overnight, low-barrier shelter when weather
4 conditions warrant. The Office and community partners shall ensure equitable
5 access to emergency cold-weather shelters for communities with a high
6 number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Shelter
7 provided pursuant to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a
8 coordinated entry assessment or case management, and shall have minimal
9 data reporting requirements.

10 (c) Alternative Agency of Human Services housing solutions. The Agency
11 of Human Services, through its various departments, provides households with
12 other time-limited or permanent housing. Such services include recovery
13 housing, various residential supports for individuals with intellectual or
14 developmental disabilities, home care services for older Vermonters and
15 individuals with physical disabilities, transitional housing for individuals
16 exiting correctional custody, and residential options for individuals with
17 mental health challenges. Emergency housing provided through the Program
18 is not intended in lieu of access to any other Agency of Human Services time-
19 limited or permanent housing.

1 § 2210. HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

2 (a) Within the funds appropriated for this purpose, a household shall
3 qualify for services under the Program if the household:

4 (1) is physically present and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced
5 by active participation in a housing, employment, or other Agency of Human
6 Services–recognized plan;

7 (2) agrees to a coordinated entry assessment that prioritizes the
8 household for permanent housing, unless explicitly exempt under this chapter;

9 (3) engages with a lead case management entity, such as a department of
10 the Agency of Human Services or a community partner, to develop a housing
11 plan and participate in employment, treatment, or other activities as
12 appropriate, unless explicitly exempt from case management requirements
13 under this chapter; and

14 (4) abides by program rules and refrains from misconduct.

15 (b)(1) The Office or a community partner shall provide clear written
16 notice to all applicants regarding penalties for fraud at the time of application.

17 (2) The Office or a community partner shall not impose a penalty upon a
18 household for a good faith, immaterial error that was corrected upon notice
19 within a reasonable period of time.

20 (3) A household that knowingly provides false, misleading, or
21 incomplete information regarding residency, disability status, household

1 composition, or other eligibility criteria shall be subject to termination of
2 services within 14 days after receiving written notice from the Department or a
3 community partner.

4 (4) Pending the outcome of a relevant Human Services Board hearing,
5 the Office may refer cases of suspected fraud to the Office of the Attorney
6 General or a State’s Attorney for investigation and prosecution under
7 applicable State law.

8 (c) A household may be terminated from the Program for repeatedly
9 refusing suitable placements following documented suitability assessments and
10 reasonable accommodations.

11 (d) An eligible household or a member of an eligible household engaged in
12 misconduct that is not related to a disability or criminal activity may be subject
13 to immediate termination of services as necessary for the safety of the
14 household, other members of the household, other households, or staff.

15 (e) As used in this section, “misconduct” means documented behaviors that
16 materially endanger the safety of others, involve the intentional destruction of
17 property, or constitute illegal activity.

18 § 2211. PRIORITIZATION

19 (a) The Office, either directly or through community partners, shall
20 prioritize services within the funds appropriated for this purpose to eligible

1 households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a
2 member who:

3 (1) is 65 years of age or older;

4 (2) has a disability;

5 (3) is a minor child;

6 (4) is pregnant;

7 (5) is experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault,
8 stalking, human trafficking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions;

9 or

10 (6) has experienced constructive conviction.

11 (b)(1) Proof of an eligible household's disability shall be verified by:

12 (A) a health care provider licensed or certified and practicing in
13 Vermont;

14 (B) a determination or certification from a State- or federally-
15 recognized agency or program that provides services to individuals with

16 disabilities; or

17 (C) self-attestation by the eligible household, subject to verification
18 by the State or community partner within 30 days when other documentation is
19 not reasonably available at the time of application.

20 (2) The presence of an eligible household member's disability shall be
21 verified by the Office or a community partner during the household's initial

1 application process and shall be redetermined annually if the household is still
2 receiving services. An eligible household with a member who has a lifelong
3 disability, such as an intellectual or developmental disability, shall not be
4 required to have the disability redetermined.

5 (c) The Office and community partners shall comply with the
6 Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101–12213, and section 504 of
7 the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, for the purposes of providing
8 reasonable modifications, effective communication, and accessible placements.
9 Program rules and case management requirements shall be reasonably
10 modified, including the use of plain language, as necessary to avoid
11 discrimination against eligible households with a member who has a disability.

12 § 2212. TIME LIMITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

13 (a) Time limits for Program participation shall be governed by the level of
14 service provided as follows:

15 (1) level 1: any temporary housing that is not provided in the form of
16 temporary rental assistance through the Program’s prevention and diversion
17 services shall not exceed 30 days per rolling 12-month period;

18 (2) level 2: the Office, in collaboration with shelter providers, shall
19 establish the maximum length of stay in highly structured shelters and low-
20 barrier shelters in rule or shelter standards;

1 (3) level 3: the Department, in collaboration with other relevant Agency
2 of Human Services' departments, shall establish the maximum length of stay in
3 specialized shelters in rule **or shelter standards**;

4 (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services may be utilized by
5 an eligible household for as long as the eligible household's plan indicates it is
6 necessary; and

7 (5) level 5: hotels and motels:

8 (A) level 5A: eligible households may receive housing at hotels and
9 motels with supportive services for not more than 70 days per rolling 12-month
10 period; and

11 (B) level 5B: eligible households may receive continual services in
12 cold-weather-use hotels and motels between December 1 and March 31.

13 (b) The Department may grant extensions to the time limits established in
14 subsection (a) of this section pursuant to criteria adopted in rule, including for:

15 (1) an eligible household actively awaiting a placement in housing,
16 treatment, or other services;

17 (2) medical necessity;

18 (3) lack of reasonable alternative accessible placements for a member of
19 the eligible household with a disability; and

20 (4) imminent risk to the health or safety of one or more of the eligible
21 household's members.

1 § 2213. CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

2 Each eligible household shall be assigned a lead case manager, except
3 where specifically exempted for certain services, which may be from any
4 Agency of Human Services department or a community partner. Case
5 management services provided pursuant to this chapter shall be informed by
6 the acuity level of the eligible household and include individualized supports
7 that connect an eligible household to public assistance, health care,
8 employment, permanent housing, and other services. A household may request
9 a change in case manager.

10 § 2214. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

11 Every fifth year beginning in 2028/2030?, the Department through the
12 Office, and in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community
13 Development, shall contract with an organization to conduct a needs
14 assessment that identifies gaps in services for homeless households in the State
15 and includes recommendations to ensure the provision of equitable services
16 throughout the State.

17 § 2215. NOTICE; APPEALS; RIGHT TO FAIR HEARING

18 (a) The Office or a community partner shall provide written notice to any
19 applicant or household whose participation in the Program is denied, reduced,
20 suspended, or terminated. Notice shall include:

1 (1) the specific factual and legal basis for the Office or community
2 partner’s decision;

3 (2) the effective date of the action, which in the case of termination,
4 reduction, or suspension of services shall not be sooner than 14 days after the
5 date of the written notice, in the household’s preferred method of
6 communication;

7 (3) a statement of the right to request a fair hearing pursuant to this
8 section; and

9 (4) clear instructions, in plain language, on the process and deadlines for
10 filing an appeal.

11 (b) An applicant for or a recipient of assistance pursuant to this chapter
12 may file a request for a fair hearing with the Human Services Board pursuant
13 to 3 V.S.A. § 3091 when:

14 (1) an application for assistance under the Program is denied in whole or
15 part;

16 (2) a household’s benefits are terminated, reduced, or suspended; or

17 (3) the household believes that benefits have not been provided in
18 accordance with applicable rules or policies.

19 (c) An applicant or household shall file a request for a fair hearing with the
20 Human Services Board within 60 days following the date that the applicant or
21 household received written notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

1 (d) If a household files a request for a fair hearing within 10 days after
2 receiving notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Office or
3 community partner providing notice shall continue to provide services under
4 the Program without interruption until a decision is issued by the Human
5 Services Board, unless:

6 (1) the household voluntarily waives continued services; or
7 (2) a household or a member of an eligible household's continued
8 receipt of services poses a risk of safety to the household, other members of the
9 household, other households, or staff.

10 (e) The hearing shall be conducted in accordance with due process
11 standards, including the right to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses,
12 and be represented by counsel or another authorized representative.

13 (f) The Human Services Board shall issue a written decision that sets forth
14 findings of fact, conclusions of law, and the basis for its decision, and the
15 process for appealing the decision to the Vermont Supreme Court.

16 (g) If the Human Services Board issues 20 substantially identical
17 decisions brought by Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum applicants
18 or recipients, the Department and community partners shall adopt the Board's
19 interpretation as part of its administration of the Program and the Department
20 shall revise the Program rules accordingly.

21 § 2216. RULEMAKING

1 The Department shall adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 for the
2 implementation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum,
3 addressing at a minimum:

4 (1) requirements for community providers participating in the Program;

5 (2) standards for highly structured, low-barrier, and specialized shelters;

6 (3) documentation requirements for household eligibility, including
7 disability;

8 (4) required elements for supportive services, including case
9 management;

10 (5) the creation of a **brief standardized initial assessment** form that may
11 be completed by hand, electronically, or by telephone;

12 (6) a process for issuing timely, written approval or denial notifications
13 to applicants;

14 (7) a process for issuing advanced notice to households when the
15 household is being terminated from the program;

16 (8) applicant and household appeal procedures;

17 (9) time limits for Program participation, including procedures for
18 extensions;

19 (10) expectations for **the Office's** oversight and quality monitoring; and

20 (11) other **subjects** as deemed necessary.

21 § 2217. REPORTING

- 1 (a) Annually, the Office shall submit a written report to the House
2 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and
3 Welfare addressing each level of the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum.
4 Minimally, the report shall address:
- 5 (1) the number of households served within each level of the continuum;
6 (2) the average length of participation for households within each level
7 of the continuum and the rate at which households successfully transition to
8 permanent housing;
9 (3) the number of households diverted from entering shelters or hotel
10 and motel placements through prevention and diversion services;
11 (4) the utilization of hotels and motels, including:
12 (A) the average nightly number of rooms used;
13 (B) the average and median length of stay; and
14 (C) the extent to which hotel and motel usage has decreased relative
15 to the prior fiscal year;
16 (5) housing stability outcomes, including rates of return to homelessness
17 within six and 12 months following exit from the Program;
18 (6) an assessment of regional capacity and access to services, including
19 identification of geographic areas with unmet needs or disproportionate
20 utilization of emergency housing resources;

1 (7) total expenditures by continuum level and funding source, including
2 State, federal, and other funds, and an analysis of cost efficiency across
3 housing models; and

4 (8) any operational barriers to implementation of the continuum, along
5 with recommendations for administrative or legislative action.

6 (b) Annually, as part of the Department’s budget presentation, the
7 Department shall set goals for increased housing capacity, including permanent
8 supportive housing, permanent affordable housing, and shelter beds. The
9 Department shall provide data pertaining to the increased shelter capacity and
10 the extent to which shelter capacity meets the needs of eligible households
11 experiencing homelessness each year.

12 * * * Continuums of Care; Required Merger * * *

13 Sec. 5. MERGER OF CONTINUUMS OF CARE

14 (a) In order to promote the effective use of resources and continuity of care,
15 the Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity
16 shall work in collaboration with the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, the
17 Balance of State Continuum of Care, and the U.S. Department of Housing and
18 Urban Development to establish a single continuum of care in the State on or
19 before October 1, 2028.

20 (b) On or before January 15, 2028, the Office shall submit a written report
21 to the House Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on

1 Health and Welfare summarizing efforts to establish a single continuum of care
2 pursuant to this section.

3 * * * Effective October 1, 2028, Requirements of Grantees * * *

4 Sec. 6. 33 V.S.A. § 2218 is added to read:

5 § 2218. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

6 Any grant or other agreement executed by the Agency of Human Services
7 or its departments shall require a community partner, as appropriate, to:

8 (1) participate in the local housing coalition or other group established
9 to assist eligible households who are homeless;

10 (2) utilize the coordinated entry assessment for eligible households who
11 are homeless or at risk of homelessness;

12 (3) utilize the appropriate planning process and options for an eligible
13 household transitioning into permanent housing, including for eligible
14 households with an individual who has an intellectual or developmental
15 disability, older Vermonters, or individuals transitioning from a correctional
16 facility or hospital; and

17 (5) measure performance outcomes, including diversion success, time-
18 to-housing, and housing retention.

19 * * * Transition; Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum * * *

20 Sec. 7. TRANSITION TO THE VERMONT HOMLESSNESS RESPONSE

21 CONTINUUM

1 with this section and the executed agreement. The statewide organization may
2 be subject to corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of
3 appropriated resources, it no longer meets the requirements of this section or
4 the executed agreement or has failed to adequately meet the needs of
5 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
6 violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under
7 this section, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there
8 is not a gap in services.

9 * * * Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program * * *

10 Sec. 11. VERMONT RENTAL ASSISTANCE BRIDGE PROGRAM

11 (a) The Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program is established within
12 the Vermont State Housing Authority for the purpose of linking households
13 who require rental assistance to permanent housing when the household does
14 not otherwise have access to relevant U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
15 Development rental assistance. The Program shall be accessible to eligible
16 clients served by each of the Agency of Human Services' departments.

17 (b) The Program shall be available to a household for not more than 24
18 months and shall not provide the full amount of the household's rental
19 payment. Program payments shall be made directly from the Vermont State
20 Housing Authority to a household's landlord.

1 (c) Program priority shall be given to current recipients of the HOME
2 Program, established pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 321(b)(2), who have not yet
3 reached 24 months of rental assistance.

4 (d) The Vermont State Housing Authority and relevant departments of the
5 Agency of Human Services shall jointly work to:

6 (1) incorporate any existing rental assistance funded by the Agency and
7 its department into the Program established in this section; and

8 (2) establish eligibility criteria and any prioritization that may be
9 necessary for this use of funds appropriated for this Program.

10 (e) It is the intent of the General Assembly that funds are appropriated for
11 the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program through fiscal year 2030.

12 * * * Payment Rate Structure and Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations * * *

13 Sec. 12. PAYMENT RATE STRUCTURE; SHELTER SERVICES

14 On or before July 1, 2027, the Department for Children and Families, in
15 collaboration with the Agency of Human Services and relevant community
16 partners, shall establish a payment rate structure, including periodic rate
17 reviews, for all shelter services required by this act. The structure shall include
18 a base rate and a supplemental payment for specialized shelter services. It is
19 not the intent of the General Assembly that the payment rate structure
20 established pursuant to this section cover the full operating expenses of shelters
21 throughout the State.

1 Sec. 13. APPROPRIATION; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

2 CONTINUUM

3 (a) In fiscal year 2027, \$82,634,153.00 is appropriated from the General
4 Fund for the provision of services, implementation of the Vermont
5 Homelessness Response Continuum, shelter development and operation, rental
6 assistance, and supportive services, including case management, as follows:

7 (1) \$X for prevention and diversion services, which comprises \$X one-
8 time funding and \$X from the base budget;

9 (2) \$X for the shelter development and services, which comprises \$X
10 one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

11 (3) \$X for specialized shelter development and services, which
12 comprises \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

13 (4) \$X for permanent supportive housing, which comprises \$X one-time
14 funding and \$X from the base budget;

15 (5) \$X for emergency housing in hotels and motels, which comprises \$X
16 one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

17 (6) \$X for rental assistance, which comprises \$X one-time funding and
18 \$X from the base budget;

19 (7) \$X for other supportive services and case management, which
20 comprises \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

1 (8) \$X for the Housing Opportunity Grant Program, which comprises
2 \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

3 (9) \$X for supportive services and shelter for households experiencing
4 domestic and sexual violence; and

5 (10) \$X for the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program.

6 (b) Any funds that remain unspent at the end of fiscal year 2027 shall be
7 carried forward for the same purpose for which they were originally
8 appropriated in this section.

9 (c) Any funds appropriated for General Assistance emergency housing or
10 the Housing Opportunity Grant Program that remain unspent at the end of
11 fiscal year 2026 shall be carried forward for investment in the Vermont
12 Homelessness Response Continuum in fiscal year 2027.

13 * * * Removing General Assistance Annual Report * * *

14 Sec. 14. 33 V.S.A. § 2115 is amended to read:

15 § 2115. ~~GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REPORT~~

16 ~~On or before September 1 of each year, the Commissioner for Children and~~
17 ~~Families shall submit a written report to the Joint Fiscal Committee; the House~~
18 ~~Committees on Appropriations, on General, Housing, and Military Affairs, and~~
19 ~~on Human Services; and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on~~
20 ~~Health and Welfare. The report shall contain the following:~~

